



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## VA TO RELEASE RESTRUCTURING REPORT

SDDVA has participated in numerous VA restructuring briefings the past two weeks. VISN 23 Network Director Robert McDivitt has hosted briefings with SDDVA, the Governor, South Dakota's congressional delegation, network partners and VA staff regarding the upcoming release of the VA's recommended redesign of the VA healthcare system. The report is scheduled to be released by the VA on Monday, March 14.

Preliminary reports indicate a significant change for South Dakota, turning the full-service VA hospitals in Fort Meade and Hot Springs into clinics, Sioux Falls VA hospital will no longer offer emergency services, and the CBOC in Wagner will be closed. Recommendations call for a new VA care system to be built in Rapid City.

The study conducted by the VA is part of the Asset and Infrastructure Review approved by Congress in the 2018 Mission Act.

The VA recommendations will be reviewed and approved by the AIR Commission. The Commission will then take testimony and public input between now and January 2023. Their findings will then be forwarded to the President and to Congress in January 2023.

Many of you will recall, it wasn't that long ago that former VA Secretary Robert Wilkie announced that Hot Springs would remain open and that there would be no reduction in services. This battle was won because we had the support of our Governor, our congressional delegation, our veterans service organizations, our county and tribal veterans service officers, state officials, community leaders, veteran network partners, and our veterans and their families.

South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem has promised to defend South Dakota veterans, saying "We will defend our South Dakota facilities and stand up for the men and women who stood up for us."

McPherson County Outreach .....	2
SDDVA Mini Conferences .....	2
Stewart Joins SDDVA Team.....	3
MJFSVH Employee of the Month.....	3
Governor Signs HB 1083 .....	4
Mellette VSO Appointed .....	4
MJFSVH Art Project .....	5
Raml to Retire.....	6
VA Crohn's Resources.....	6
VA Suicide Prevention .....	7
Equine Therapy.....	8
Property Tax Relief .....	9
Upcoming Events.....	10



# BOSHARD HOSTS VETERANS “COFFEE AND COOKIES”

Sam Boshard, McPherson County Veterans Service Officer, hosted “Veterans Coffee and Cookies” February 24 and March 1.

The events were held in Leola and Eureka.

Events like these allow veterans service officers and SDDVA’s field service officers to visit one-on-one with veterans.

SDDVA Field Service Officer Kevin Bowen represented the Department at both events.



## SDDVA TO HOST MINI CONFERENCES

SDDVA will be hosting their annual Spring Mini Conferences May 10-12 in three locations.

The May 10th event will be held in Western South Dakota at the Pennington County Conference Room in the Care Building in Rapid City (321 Kansas City Street).

The May 11 Conference will be held at the American Legion Post 8 Cabin in Pierre (520 S. Pierre Street).

The May 12 Conference will be held in Eastern South Dakota (location to be determined).

Training will run from 10:00 am—2:00 pm at each location and will include a two-hour training session on QPR. Questions, Persuade, and Refer is an educational program designed to teach the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to respond.

# STEWART JOINS SDDVA TEAM

Please join SDDVA in welcoming Julie Stewart to our team. Julie serves as the accounting assistant in the business office at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs.

Julie and her family moved to Hot Springs from Colorado in 2020.



# FUENTES NAMED MJFSVH EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Nikki Fuentes has been named the “employee of the month” for March, at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Nikki a registered nurse and has been a part of the SDDVA team since February of 2017. She serves as a charge nurse in the Veterans Lane and Old Glory neighborhoods. She is always willing to answer any questions other members of the team have and is first to volunteer to work extra shifts. Nikki diligently ensures that things run smoothly on the unit. She is a great mentor, helping with training and guiding less experienced nursing staff.

We are proud to have Nikki on our team and thank her for her endless dedication, reliability, and team player mentality.

# GOVERNOR SIGNS HOUSE BILL 1083

This week, SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock and Fall River County Veterans Service Officer Dan Cullen had the honor to witness Governor Kristi Noem signing House Bill 1083 into law.

House Bill 1083 is a bill brought forward by Cullen to provide a partial property tax exemption for surviving spouses of certain veterans. You can view a copy of HB 1083 [here](#).

Sponsors of the bill include:  
Representatives: Goodwin, (prime), Aylward, Hoffman, Jensen (Phil), Miskimins, Mulally, Perry, Randolph, and St. John and Senators Frye-Mueller, Smith (VJ), Stalzer, and Zikmund.

House Bill 1083 did not have an emergency clause so it will not go into effect until July 1.



# MELLETTE COUNTY APPOINTS NEW COUNTY VSO

Mellette County Commissioners have appointed Clinton Rasmusson as their new county veterans service officer.

Clinton's office hours will be 1:00 pm—5:00 pm first and third Tuesdays and by appointment.

Contact information for Clinton is as follows:

Office phone: 605-259-3291

Email: [mellettecountyvso@gmail.com](mailto:mellettecountyvso@gmail.com)

Please join SDDVA in welcoming Clinton to the veteran network.



Artist Ariadne Albright visited the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home this week and hosted an art project for community wellness.

This project is about bringing art into the everyday landscape and to teach geometry, color theory, and painting techniques.



# **RAML TO RETIRE FROM CODINGTON COUNTY**

SDDVA has received word that Peg Raml will be retiring from her position at the Codington County Veterans Service Office July 31, 2022.

Peg has worked for Codington County since June of 1992 and will have dedicated over 30 years of service. She has trained four county veterans service officers!

One can only guess the number of lives she has touched. Her dedication and commitment is evident in her devotion of 30 years of support, assistance, and leadership. Her work ethic and outstanding personality will be missed.

Peg was recognized by her peers in 2016 and was awarded the SDDVA Partner of the Year award.

You have time between now and July to give Peg a call, or take her out to lunch and thank her for the veterans she has helped over her 30 years in the VSO office.

We at SDDVA congratulate Peg on her retirement and thank her for all she has done for our veterans and their families. We wish her the best in the next chapters of her life.

# **VA RESOURCES FOR CROHN'S DISEASE AND ULCERATIVE COLITIS**

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs encourages veterans affected by inflammatory bowel diseases to access a new [website](#) that raises awareness of Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

Veterans can use the site to get step-by-step instructions to access treatment and links to VA resources — connecting with online communities and peer to peer support to improve their quality of life.

"A 2020 [study of VA data](#) found that rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder increased among veterans diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease over time," said National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships Nurse Executive Tracy L. Weistreich, Ph.D. "It's important we find ways to assist our veterans with all issues relevant to this chronic condition, especially veterans who may not be receiving care through the VA."

Through this partnership, the [Crohn's & Colitis Foundation](#) will provide educational materials and share resources widely with VA staff, veterans, and the public to increase knowledge about inflammatory bowel diseases and treatment options. The VA will train the Foundation on veteran-specific concerns like suicide prevention and share free resources such as the [Veterans Crisis Line](#).

# VA PUBLISHES INTERIM FINAL RULE FOR STAFF SERGEANT PARKER GORDON FOX SUICIDE PREVENTION GRANT PROGRAM

As part of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' and national suicide prevention efforts, the VA is publishing an Interim Final Rule March 10, 2022, implementing section 201 of the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, known as the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program.

Publishing this rule will specify grant eligibility criteria, application requirements, scoring criteria, and other elements necessary to implement this grant program.

The SSG Fox SPGP is a three-year community-based grant program that will provide financial assistance to eligible entities to provide or coordinate the provision of suicide prevention services for eligible individuals and their families.

"Communities play an important role in ending veteran suicide," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "This grant program will invest in and seek to strengthen local community capacity to conduct outreach to veterans, other eligible individuals, and their families and provide them with suicide prevention services and resources."

The VA anticipates publishing a Notice of Funding Opportunity in April with instructions on how to apply for a grant under the SSG Fox SPGP.

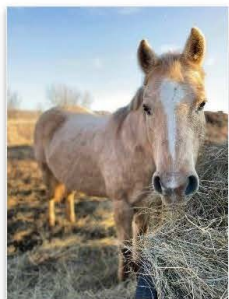
Information on the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide prevention grants can be found [here](#).

The official version of this rule is scheduled to publish in the Federal Register March 10, 2022. However, the document is available for [previewing](#).



**Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grants**





### **Equine Therapy Group**

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday April-June, 2022

#### **Group Curriculum:**

<b>April 4, 2022</b>	SESSION 1: The Process of Trauma and Reactions to Trauma
<b>April 18, 2022</b>	SESSION 2: Grounding and Self Soothing
<b>May 2, 2022</b>	SESSION 3: The Mind and Body Connection
<b>May 16, 2022</b>	SESSION 4: Our Feelings
<b>June 6, 2022</b>	SESSION 5: Healthy Relationships
<b>June 20, 2022</b>	SESSION 6: Endings and Beginnings

**Time:** 1100-1300

**Location:** HorsePower; 26659 Blue Sage Ln, Ste 100, Sioux Falls, SD 57106

**Phone:** 605-251-1685

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE EQUINE THERAPY GROUP,  
PLEASE CONTACT:**

**Karen Cordie, MSW CSW-PIP  
Sioux Falls Vet Center 605-330-4552**

This is an OPEN group: you do not have to attend all sessions.  
Intake must be completed prior to first group for new clients.

Please wear appropriate clothing and footwear.





# ELDERLY AND DISABLED SOUTH DAKOTANS HAVE UNTIL APRIL FIRST TO APPLY FOR PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

Elderly and disabled South Dakotans have until April 1, 2022, to apply for property tax relief under South Dakota's Assessment Freeze for the Elderly and Disabled Program.

Under the program, a qualifying homeowner's property assessment is prevented from increasing for tax purposes. If the actual value of the home increases, the homeowner still pays property taxes on the lower value.

To be eligible for the Assessment Freeze for the Elderly and Disabled Program, individuals must meet the following qualifications:

Have income of less than \$30,423 for a single-member household (Only one individual in the household) or less than \$38,029 for a multiple-member household.

- Have owned or retained a life estate in a single-family dwelling for at least one year and have been a resident of South Dakota for at least one year.
- Have resided in the single-family dwelling for at least 200 days of the previous calendar year.
- Be 65 years of age or older or disabled (as defined by the Social Security Act).
- Un-remarried widows/widowers of those who previously qualified for the program may still qualify in some circumstances.

The valuation limit for the program is \$208,828 or more of full and true value, meaning that properties valued above the limit are not eligible unless the applicant has previously qualified.

Applications must be submitted to your local county treasurer's office by the April 1 deadline. Applications are available at your local county treasurer's offices or can be printed from the Department of Revenue's website at <https://sddor.seamlessdocs.com/f/pt38>. For more information, please visit <https://dor.sd.gov/individuals/taxes/property-tax/relief-programs/#freeze> or call us at (800) 829-9188, option 2.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

- Mar 26—Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat—Our Savior Lutheran Church (909 W. 33rd Street)—Sioux Falls—8:30 am—1:30 pm (CT)
- Apr 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
- Apr 8-10—DAV of South Dakota State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites (445 Mt. Rushmore Road)—Rapid City
- Apr 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Military Heritage Alliance Building—Spirit of America Room—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
- May 10—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room in the Care Building in Rapid City (321 Kansas City Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
- May 11—SDDVA Mini Conference—American Legion Post 8 Cabin in Pierre (520 S. Pierre Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 12—SDDVA Mini Conference—Eastern South Dakota—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 14-15—Ellsworth AFB Air Show
- May 30—Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery (25965 477th Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
- May 30—Memorial Day Program—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home —(2500 Minnekahta Avenue)—Hot Springs—10:00 am (MT)
- Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—4-H Fairgrounds (3200 W Havens Avenue)—Mitchell
- Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride—SD Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls
- Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown
- Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
- Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls
- Aug 6-9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
- Aug 14-19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City
- Aug 15-17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
- Aug 18-23—USS Iowa Veterans Association Reunion—Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center—Rapid City
- Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
- Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair
- Sep 10—Heroes Helping with Horsepower Military Appreciation Event—W. Main Street—Ethan—Festivities begin at 8:00 am (CT)
- Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
- Oct 15—Midwest Honor Flight Fifth Annual Hangar Dance—SD Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm (CT)
- Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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